

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7895

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, NI

SUBJECT: SUSPENDED BRIGADIERS RETIRED INVOLUNTARILY

REF: LAGOS 2258

SUMMARY: BRIGADIERS ADEKUNLE AND SOTONI, SUSPENDED IN MARCH FOR ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN DRUG SMUGGLING, HAVE BEEN INVOLUNTARILY RETIRED FROM ARMY. DECISION REMOVES TWO SENIOR YORUBA OFFICERS FROM POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE, BUT APPEARS IMMUNE FROM SERIOUS CRITICISM BY YORUBA CIRCLES WHICH HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY PUSHING ANTI-CORRUPTION THEME IN CONNECTION WITH "TARKA AFFAIR".
END SUMMARY

1. DAILY TIMES AUGUST 22 REPORTED THAT BRIGADIERS ADEKUNLE AND SOTOMI, SUSPENDED FIVE MONTHS AGO FOR ALLEGED INVOLVEMENT IN HEMP SMUGGLING CASE (REFTEL), HAVE BEEN "COMPULSORILY RETIRED FROM THE ARMY". ACCORDING PRESS ACCOUNT, ARMY COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION FOR THEIR RETIREMENT WAS APPROVED BY GOWON, AND LETTERS INFORMING TWO BRIGADIERS OF DECISION WERE DELIVERED TO THEM AUGUST 20.

2. LETTER FROM GOWON TO ADEKUNLE, PUBLISHED BY TIMES AND OTHER PAPERS AUGUST 23, STATES THAT HEADS OF SERVICE AND ARMY COUNCIL REFRAINED FROM REFERRING CASE AGAINST
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ADEKUNLE TO COURT MARTIAL "SO AS TO SAVE NATION AND YOU

FROM FURTHER EMBARRASSMENT". GOWON NOTES ADEKUNLE'S PAST SERVICES TO NATION, AND OBSERVES THAT THESE HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN DECISION TO "TAKE LENIENT VIEW" OF CASE. HEAD OF STATE ALSO REMARKS ON FACT THAT HE HAS IN PAST "CONSISTENTLY OVERLOOKED NUMEROUS REPORTS OF WRONG-GOINGS BY YOU IN AND OUT OF SERVICE" AND ADVISES ADEKUNLE "BE SCRUPULOUSLY SELECTIVE OF TYPE OF PERSONS YOU ASSOCIATE WITH IN FUTURE."

3. ACCORDING TO TIME AND SKETCH, ADEKUNLE HAS PROTESTED HIS INNOCENCE BUT INSISTED HE BEARS NO MALICE TOWARD ANYONE. IN SKETCH INTERVIEW, HE NONETHELESS ACCUSED PROSECUTORS AND JUDGES OF "PARTIALITY" IN REACHING THEIR DECISION AND SAID HE WOULD STILL WELCOME OPEN JUDICIAL INQUIRY AT WHICH HE COULD MOUNT PUBLIC DEFENSE. SOTOMI HAS REFUSED MAKE ANY COMMENTS TO PRESS AND LETTER SENT HIM BY GOWON REMAINS UNPUBLISHED.

4. INTERESTINGLY, ONLY YORUBA PRESS HAS THUS FAR OFFERED SIGNIFICANT COVERAGE OF DISMISSAL ADEKUNLE AND SOTOMI, AND THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL STATEMENT FROM FMG. SOLE EDITORIAL REACTION TO DATE APPEARS IN AUGUST 23 DAILY TIMES, WHICH ASSERTS THAT TWO BRIGADIERS DISMISSED ESSENTIALLY FOR ASSOCIATING WITH "PEOPLE OF SHADY CHARACTER" RATHER THAN FOR PROVEN MISDEEDS. TIMES GOES ON TO APPLAUD THIS "NEW STANDARD OF PUBLIC MORALITY" AND TO URGE THAT IT BE APPLIED MORE BROADLY IN FUTURE.

5. COMMENT: AS NOTED REFTTEL, BOTH ADEKUNLE AND SOTOMI HAVE CHECKERED REPUTATIONS AND THERE HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD ASSUMPTION THAT INVESTIGATION WOULD TURN UP SUFFICIENT GROUNDS FOR ACTION AGAINST THEM EVEN IF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SPECIFIC DRUG CASE WHICH TRIGGERED SUSPENSION COULD NOT BE PROVED CONCLUSIVELY. AS GOWON LETTER SUGGESTS, EVIDENCE OF PECCADILLOS WAS PRESUMABLY NOT LACKING, AND FEW ARE LIKELY TO ARGUE THAT BRIGADIERS WERE INNOCENT OF ALL IMPROBITY.

6. THUS, PROBLEM FOR FMG WAS NOT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT TWO MEN WERE IN FACT GUILTY, BUT RATHER TO DEAL WITH CASE IN CONFIDENTIAL

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WHICH THEIR MISDEEDS HAD BECOME EMBARRASSINGLY PUBLIC IN SUCH MANNER AS TO AVOID FRACTURING COHESIVENESS OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP OR GIVING GROUNDS FOR YORUBA CHARGES OF TRIBAL DISCRIMINATION. STYLE AND TIMING OF THIS WEEK'S FMG DECISION APPEAR WELL CALCULATED TO ACHIEVE THESE ENDS. FACT THAT BRIGADIERS WERE RETIRED (EVIDENTLY ON FULL PENSION) RATHER THAN DISMISSED OR PUBLICLY TRIED MAKES ACTION APPEAR LESS HARSH THAN WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN

CASE. TIMING SHOULD ALSO DISARM POTENTIAL YORUBA
CRITICS OF ACTION, SINCE THEY HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED
IN ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN STIRRED BY "TARKA AFFAIR"
AND WILL BE HARD PUT TO DEFEND BRIGADIERS RETIRED FOR
MISCONDUCT. IN CONSEQUENCE, THOUGH YORUBA WILL BE
UNHAPPY AT LOSS OF TWO SENIOR POSTS, FMG SHOULD BE ABLE
WEATHER THIS STORM WITHOUT UNDUE DIFFICULTY.
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